

The Americanisation of the reformed university in Argentina

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Introduction: the crisis of university identity

Recently in Argentina we were visited by the Nobel Prize winner for Literature, José Saramago, of Portuguese nationality, who attended the tribute to the well-known Argentine writer, Jorge Luis Borges (nominated numerous times by the Swedish Academy but never awarded the Prize). Saramago, in the name of a community which is not valued on the stock exchange, criticised the effects of the neo-liberal economic model that affects our emerging countries. He was referring to the community of artists, writers, scientists, historians, poets, professors, integrated together as the *tribe of sensitive souls*.

In this article I would like to present the other side of globalisation. I would like us to imagine that we belong to the tribe of sensitive souls, in order to share a fictional identity for the defence of different cultural meanings and civic democratic values. I will attempt to demonstrate how the agenda for 'modernisation in higher education' responds to interests of an economic rather than an academic nature, and aspires to eradicate an important identifying tradition: that of the humanistic professional, committed to the community and to democratic practices.

The British historian Eric Hobsbawm (1989, 1998) wrote about the importance of traditions that perpetuate and form the basis for social practices, and strengthen social, institutional and family identity. In Argentina, democratic culture in what is called the 'Reformist' tradition was first practised in the universities, beginning in 1918. Unfortunately the subsequent history of Reformism in the universities was marred by the successive interruptions produced by military dictatorships. Notwithstanding, the Reformist Movement introduced Argentine and Latin American universities to a tradition that turned out to be exportable. The world witnessed the emergence of an intellectual personality that was learning to integrate professional and scientific training with civic commitment, critical thinking and pluralist autonomy. The Reformist tradition was grounded in university autonomy, free tuition, the role of the state as guardian of culture and the sciences, the training of the ruling class in public universities, and intellectual and disciplinary diversity. The French May of 1968 drew heavily upon Reformist inspiration.

At the start of the 1990s, the traditional Reformist values came under attack, in biased analyses of Argentine higher education that were elaborated by agents with particular economic interests - the World Bank, the Argentine Industrial Union, the Bank Boston Foundation, SOFIA, FIEL, and other banking foundations. The Law of Higher Education enacted in 1995 attempted to modify some of the Reformist tradition. In questioning these developments, I do not seek to negate the evaluative culture as such, or oppose myself to the logic of incentives for scientific productivity. Rather, it is a question of defending excellence as the internal academic criteria, in addition to the external quantitative perspective of business interests.

In Argentina, towards the end of the second millennium, cultural expression has been subordinated to the rules of the market. The State selectively finances what appears to be 'efficient'. For example, incentives are promised to faculty members on the basis of productivity indicators (although they are not paid, due to the lack of public funds for education). A Fund for the improvement of Quality allocates resources where quality previously exists, provoking the so-called Matthew Effect: that is, granting more resources to those who already have the most.

The crisis that is most dramatically affecting universities in my country is a crisis of identity. Why an identity crisis? The reforms pushed forward by the World Bank in Latin America and in formerly communist countries derive from global, universal and homogenous diagnoses based on economic interests rather than the goal of scholarly innovation. Most of the reforms carried out in the so-called emerging countries are efficiency-oriented, aimed at the privatisation of public universities and at the discursive recognition of the market as the source of innovation and quality. Correspondingly, the expansion of the training of professionals for the service sector reinforces the predominance of a globalised entrepreneurial university profile. The preferred careers of youth today are Business Administration, Marketing, Computer Sciences, and Communication Sciences.

In order to explain the identity crisis we can use the metaphor of 'medical diagnosis'. A wrong illness has been diagnosed, to force us into buying the wrong remedy. The university reforms of the 1990s in Argentina have not improved academic traditions but, rather, have had a

negative impact on the national culture. They have impoverished the arts, literature, and social sciences, obviously none of which are priced on the stock exchange.

Martin Carnoy points out that the Political Economy of education treats 'education as a factor shaped by the power relations between different economic, political and social groups' (Carnoy 1998). For political economists no study of the educational system can be separated from an implicit or explicit analysis of the purpose and functioning of the government sector. Since power is expressed at least in part, through a society's political system, any model of educational reform based in political economy, has behind it a theory of the state.

My intention in this article is to demonstrate the character of the perspective that the political economy of higher education contributes to understanding the crisis of the University; and to elaborate alternatives for resolving institutional problems, derived from cultural analysis. Economy is a most powerful human science. When it is dehumanised, as is the case in Argentina, it is reduced to finances, to the administration of balances-of-payment and to the interests of investors. Such economic policies lose sight of the actors who suffer and perish, subordinated to the performance of economic indicators.

The main purpose of this article is to present a different approach to the diagnostic framework used by international agencies and local banking agents. I personally believe that replacing the pragmatic economic analysis with a cultural analysis of universities, enabling us to elaborate another diagnosis, can provide solutions for supporting institutional improvement.

Understanding higher education: between knowledge and learning

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) draws attention to a revealing difference between the words 'learning' and 'knowledge', suggesting a preference for the former. Lyotard maintains that 'knowledge' is the set of statements that denote or describe objects, excluding all other statements. These statements are susceptible to being declared 'true' or 'false'. On the other hand 'learning' goes beyond this characterisation. Learning refers to an 'ability that exceeds the determination and the application of criteria of truth' and that extends to the criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), and sonorous and chromatic beauty (auditory, visual sensitivity, etc.). Learning, thus conceived, refers to a set of abilities. Moreover, it refers to the subject who fulfils these abilities, that is, to the 'wise man'. Nonetheless, the increasing complexity of social activities through history has required differentiated, profound and complex knowledge all at once. The history of universities is the history of the process of complexity and the systematisation of knowledge, which has its origin in the 'wise man' (the

intellectual) but later gave rise to the scientist, the professional and the specialist.

Learning has expanded beyond the subject that initially contained it. It became expressed through writing, then it became accumulated outside of individuals in books, giving rise to the modern culture of the book. Practices of learning that used to be spontaneous became organised and institutionalised. They became limited and fixed within universities where organised knowledge was kept, specialised and disseminated, up to the present day. Since then, the history of universities is the history of the institutions that have knowledge to store, knowledge to distribute, knowledge to discover, knowledge that is produced, invented, censored or simply repeated.

The prestigious historian of British universities, Sheldon Rothblatt (1988, 1989), in an illuminating piece, describes the importance of analysing 'the idea of the idea of a university'. A university can be recognised according to the particular aims that define it or differentiate it from other social institutions, for which purpose the 'tradition' or the 'idea' that the institution embodies must be taken into account. Thus, for example, the idea of Newman's university, embodied by English Colleges at the middle of the nineteenth century and inspired by Oxford University (Newman 1881; Jay 1983), contrasts with the German university of Von Humboldt. Newman's idea affirms that the university is the place to study universal knowledge. Its principal function is the teaching or distribution of that knowledge. It is oriented towards teaching and its institutional organisation is that of a College with a general curriculum, emulating the classical liberal arts model. The university forms and trains the elite of Church and State through a curriculum that maintains political stability and presents a comprehensive system of ideas and values.

The idea embodied by the second type of university, the German style, is constituted by three concepts:

- *lehrfreiheit*, the right to teach according to one's ability, generally referred to as 'course autonomy';
- *lernfreiheit*, the right to choose the course of one's preferred professor, and;
- *bildung* self-learning and striving toward intellectual and spiritual perfection.

This type of university focuses upon the investigation of knowledge or *wissenschaft*, and upon individual efforts to achieve intellectual and spiritual perfection through a general curriculum directly linked to the academic profession, considered as a part of the civil service of the State.

North and South

Joaquín Brunner (1988, 1993) recognises the existence of two mutually exclusive approaches for studying the functioning of systems of higher education, each belonging to different geo-cultural territories: the North and the South. *Organisational analysis* is applied in the developed

North, mainly in North America: Burton Clark (1983, 1984, 1987a, 1987b) has a leading role in this perspective. *Sociological-historic* analysis is currently used in the South. In the last decade it has become a dominant perspective in Latin America, particularly in Argentina (Gregorio Weinberg, German Rama, Hanns Steger, Daniel Cano, Marcela Mollis).

Organisational analysis is characterised by its internal and synchronic emphasis. Priority is given to learning relevance, disciplines, differentiation, work relations and the structure of the system. On the other hand, sociological-historic analysis emphasises external and diachronic forces. Priority is given to the actors and their interests, and relevance to macro processes in different periods. In understanding the macro rationale, the issue of power is key.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the style of university was characterised by professional knowledge. In the case of Latin America, it is described by Hanns Steger (1974) as the 'University of Lawyers'.

The growth of professions and its relation to social mobility in different European societies has been the subject of numerous studies, brought up to date by works such as that of Peter Flora and Arnold Heidenheimer (1981), and that of Gomez Campo and Tenti Fanfani (1989) for Latin America. When using a comparative approach to distinguish the growth of professions associated with the rise in social status, the work of Joseph Ben-David (1966) remains a classic. In the development of higher education in industrialised nations during the first decades of this century, universities and institutes of technology, professions, and social mobility constitute a representative trilogy.

Luis Sherz (1968) recognises in the professional university a predominantly secular, pragmatic and statist conception, which assumes responsibility for the formation of citizens, professionals and administrators. The same author affirms that this model emerged together with the Napoleonic idea of the university.

Lawyers graduating from these institutions were professionally and ideologically linked to the idea of agrarian property, and as statesmen or public functionaries they created the instruments of political control within State institutions, such as the courts, public prosecutor's offices and police departments. Through schools and the press they engaged in other activities that permitted the dominant classes to broaden their forms of expression as writers, poets and educators. 'This group generated a bureaucratic elite and a political class with a formalist style that was perfectly suited to the interests of the dominant classes' (Sherz, 1968).

One of the constituent characteristics of this type of university is its academic and administrative autonomy in organising the institutional program. Nonetheless, despite the aforementioned autonomy, Latin American govern-

ments have historically exercised their power of control over universities whenever they have been seen to stray too far from tolerated behaviour. In any case, what appears to be the central task of the 'University of Lawyers' is that of professional training. For this reason, it serves the interests and needs of a social class that is primarily *political and cultural*, that shares or controls political power, exercises considerable influence in the area of ideas, and has increasing leverage over the system of cultural institutions.

Cultural analysis of university institutions

Another useful approach for understanding universities from a historical perspective is what Willem Frijhoff (1986) has called *cultural analysis*. Cultural analysis draws on Anthropology in considering the university as an articulated part of culture, that is, as a space for cultural mediation. In universities, the cultural practices of the creation, appropriation and transmission of knowledge constitute values and representations at the highest level within the system of education. The images, rules and strategies produced in the confrontation between different roles and representations reveal the role of high culture in different societies.

The cultural analysis of universities refers to three interrelated dimensions: the *historical*, *social* and *anthropological*. The historical dimension alludes to the history of intellectual and aesthetic products, which may be considered as the highest level. The social dimension refers to the actions taken by a society to apply these ideas: such actions determine the position – hierarchical or not – of the arts, sciences and technology as referents for shaping norms, values, images and codes determining social life as a whole. The anthropological dimension refers to the universities as spaces in which certain forms of basic social organisation are elaborated, establishing timetables, gestures, attitudes and modes of reflection. They reproduce the intellectual, social and political behaviour of an elite that, in turn, presents itself as a model to be followed by subordinate groups.

This cultural analysis of universities contributes to our understanding of the current crisis in institutions of higher education. Here the university is not viewed as an autonomous institution that produces ideas that society may or may not consume. Quite the contrary: the university is governed by complex processes of interaction between the nature of science, the professions and the disciplines, and the expansion or contraction of the labour market. It reflects the differences between social classes, ethnic minorities, gender dynamics, and the respective positions of manual and intellectual labour on the scale of social values. In this sense, the university as a cultural institution produces, controls and gives legitimacy to knowledge and meanings, in a context of constant tension between the way these elements are understood by society, by the State and by the market.

The reformist culture that changed Argentine universities

The student movement of the Reform gave Latin American universities, especially Argentine universities, their particular organisational style and government. The Reformist ideology was, fundamentally, Latin Americanist and anti-imperialist. It strongly supported the political engagement of University youth with what was perceived as the national and Latin American destiny. The Reformist culture of 1918 has been inherited by the institutions of today.

What were the triumphs of the young Reformist? In a restricted sense, student participation in the university's decision-making process. In a broad sense, they were university autonomy, the appointment of teaching staff by periodical examination and competition, open access to courses, updated teaching methods, and a system of university co-governance with the representation of three key groups (professors, students and graduates) in the governing bodies of the university. All public universities (the two oldest being the University of Cordoba, founded by the Jesuit Order in 1610, and the University of Buenos Aires, founded in 1824) are ruled by co-governance in the Collegiate governing bodies: the University Assembly, the Superior University Council and the Directive Councils of each School.

The Reformist movement emerged one year after the Russian Revolution and was consolidated under the first Argentine democratic government without electoral fraud (1916-1922 and 1928-1930). This political innovation implied a profound renovation in Argentine social life. For the first time in national political history, a government was representative of the majority and, as such, permeable to the influence of different sectors during this period.

Despite the efforts of Yrigoyen's democratic government to pursue independent national policies, economic structures remained in the hands of the conservative oligarchy, which maintained its majority in Congress. Both the foundational oligarchical State, and the welfare State of the first Radical government, needed to consolidate their legitimacy and public authority. Thus the Radical government sought to build an institutional alliance with the public universities.

The Reformist democratisation of the universities can be understood, first, as the quantitative incorporation of those social sectors that had been traditionally excluded from these institutions. The quantitative incorporation was apparent in the notable increase between 1918-1923 in the number of immigrant offspring from the growing middle classes that registered in the universities. Second, University Reform was marked by a qualitative dimension, by the political representation won by two new university strata, students and alumni, in the collegial bodies of university government. The Reformist period saw the creation of a democratic university model, in advance of the student 'massification' of the 1970s.

One of the most important principles promoted by the youth of the University Reform was the lifting of limits on the number of students entering the University:

The State shall guarantee all citizens the possibility of attending the university and to respect their innermost freedom, to which end free and absolutely secular education is to be established.

The qualitative democratisation meant not only the inclusion of the non-elite groups in the make-up of the university, but also the political representation of the new university actors, the students and graduates. All of these groups together were to become the constituency of institutional government generating the internal democratisation of the university. Thus the young student leaders broke the monopoly that the conservative academic elite had exercised in political-administrative university decisions. The behaviour of the national universities during this stage vividly illustrated the intimate relationship between the university and the social changes of the period. The sectors that had recently arrived in government, via non-fraudulent elections, faced the necessity of conquering institutional spaces formerly dominated by the oligarchical State. The objective of political domination, and the need for the new governmental actors to establish legitimate public authority, demanded the 'conquest' of the universities.

The government's support for the University Reform of 1918 was expressed by the Minister of Public Instruction at that time, on behalf of the President of Argentina, on the occasion of the centennial of the University of Buenos Aires, August 12, 1921:

...The new life of the Nation that is no longer governed but, rather, governs itself. We can affirm that at the present time, the Argentine University, having cast off its former garb, liberated from privileged circles, removed from special interests, with neither allegiances nor selfish interests ... can march toward the securing of its essential attributes as an autonomous, educational and democratic institution. The three entities that form the university organism participate equally in its constitution: the authorities, precisely as such, the professors, in all categories and denominations, and the students, the life and soul of the Institution... The feverish and passionate participation of the youth in the noble enthusiasm for the reform, that sounded the alarm for the long overdue moral progress of the Republic, is none other than the reality of university democracy...

The democratisation of the universities survived with the support and the agreement of the President and some of his ministers. The first and second generation children of the rising immigrant population, that had left the rural countryside and moved to the cities, went to the universities and obtained diplomas which, in turn, made it possible for them to be heard in the Congress and to have their rights assured. Their parents' labour in industry and

commerce, as well as in agriculture, permitted them to become 'university students' and to acquire the prestige bestowed by the title 'Doctor' or 'Lawyer'.

Intermittently, successive military dictatorships in the years 1930, 1966 and 1976 put an end to the democratic period initiated by the Reform. The statutes of the Argentine universities, as Reformed after 1918, were modified and censured. Student participation in university government was suppressed, being considered 'anarchistic'. Military dictatorships expelled, imprisoned and just two decades ago, caused to 'disappear' many hundreds of people, including Reformist professors and students.

University missions, values and ethos

Alexander Astin (1994) asserts that the evaluation practices carried out in the universities are a faithful reflection of institutional values that, in turn, promote institutional goals and missions. What were the missions supported by the Reformists? Have they changed?

The three constituent missions of the Reformist organisational culture, interrupted during the political periods of the military dictatorship, were teaching, research and extension. Today we must add the new institutional goals of administration and management to the original 'multi-functional' description of the university.

Nonetheless, history tells us that the multiple missions of the Argentine universities were dominated by one of these functions: the teaching of professions.

The vast literature of the Reformist Movement reveals its renewed university 'ethos', that of the *humanistic professional*. The Reformists criticised the lack of comprehensive training, the absence of historical and literary contents in the curricula for technical careers, and a dearth of 'cultural and community consciousness'. This critique was sustained and defended by authorities of the governing organisms of the national universities, such as Rafael Araya, Gabriel Del Mazo, Julio Gonzalez and Alfredo Palacios.

The Rector of the Universidad Nacional del Litoral (the National University of the Littoral), Dr. Rafael Araya, in 1928 expressed what he believed to be the social function of the modern University:

The University has always remained indifferent to its true mission, which is to train people according to a comprehensive conception of education. The University has limited itself to preparing technicians and scientists, within an environment that is, in some measure, distant from real life, indifferent to and unconcerned with the social consequences which should have been directed toward the greatest diffusion of public culture in an environment of spiritual liberty... (Araya, 1928).

This quotation refers to a training ideal inspired by the Anglo-Saxon model, encouraging knowledge of the Liberal Arts in the comprehensive training of future leaders, in accordance with the idea of the university put forth by

Cardinal Newman in the mid-nineteenth century. The Reformists of the Argentine universities contributed to the formation of the ethos of the university by replacing the traditional elitist subject, who was oriented by the ethic of privilege, with the active political subject: the middle class cultivated in the universities for national leadership.

Gabriel del Mazo, in a conference held in the main lecture hall of the Faculty of Legal and Social Sciences, under the auspices of the Student Centre of the Faculty of Law of the University of La Plata, explained:

Our universities have inverted the natural process of human culture... and the consequence has been the production of a type of uncultured professional; that which has been called the 'modern barbarian'... The University should not refer to itself as such if it does not have solid cultural bases for the formation of the professional, or if it has become hypertrophied in its technical function and is inspired only for individual utilitarian ends, without intellectual ties that maintain human solidarity... The university-trained techno-professional must be nourished with those elements of learning that make a person complete as a member of the national community (del Mazo, 1955).

This identification of the University as an institution for the formation of elite leaders and humanistic professionals places the emphasis of training and preparing professionals for political performance on another feature of the Reformist university culture. As Alberto Mendioroz put it:

I also affirm that my hope is that the youth, more precisely the university youth, who must govern tomorrow, is to whom will fall this sacred labor... From the University we can and we must expect the spiritual harmony of the Nation to come, the university will give us idealistic children and lovers to govern the Nation (quoted in Ciria and Sanguinetti 1983, 12).

This quotation is revealing. It anticipated the scenario that prevails in universities today: the triumph of professional training in traditional careers such as Law, Medicine and Civil Engineering. These diplomas opened direct access to national government. Thus, the formation of human resources were practically eliminated from university education, subordinated to a kind of industrial development, until the advent of the doctrine of adjustments and the globalised market of the 1990s.

The modernisation agenda: rejection of the Reformist tradition?

Most of the institutional practices of the Reformist tradition are still in use, though the old social context of the production and dissemination of knowledge, its circulation and appropriation, is obsolete. It entered into crisis, in the same way that the social status of the liberal professions entered into crisis. The traditional values of Reformist culture supported the maintenance of 'universi-

ty excellence' through meritocratic competition among, and regular evaluation of, university staff. However, growth in the number of students led to the hiring of part-time teaching assistants who were recent graduates with no teaching experience and low levels of professional knowledge, contributing to later 'diagnoses' of poor academic performance. The lack of professionalisation in university leadership, outdated curricular contents, low researcher salaries, and demagogic strategies regarding the constituency of administrative staff, have become significant obstacles to the achievement of better academic 'excellence'.

Adding to these problems of the Reformist tradition is the so-called 'solutions' to the problems of the universities that are propagated by such agencies as the World Bank. Since the 1980s the consequences of the so-called 'crisis of the Welfare State' have become increasingly serious. This crisis has been accompanied by a crushing external debt, the stagnation of economic growth, and the impoverishment and marginalisation of an increasing number of the population, provoking the consequent widening of social inequalities.

We agree with Maurice Kogan (1998) and his research associates in regard to the purpose that most higher education comparative analysis should accomplish: 'to comprehend the purposes for which and the strategies by which policy is elaborated'. Their British/ Norwegian/ Swedish project illuminates the relationship between theories of the state, government, and educational reform. The zones compared by this project coincide with the issues we explore here:

- Changes in the theories of the state in the three countries
- Changes in the mechanisms of government in the three countries
- Policy formation and the place of elites, interests groups and networks
- The nature of the reform created by government
- The impacts of reform in terms of epistemic identities.

Using the cultural analysis of universities jointly with the socio-historical framework, our analytical interest goes beyond the purposes of Kogan's project. It extends to incorporating the global role of the international agents in the shaping of reform policies in higher education.

In its brief diagnosis of the university situation in Argentina, the World Bank (1993; 1994) approaches the problem of quality in education by linking it to two key concepts of the Reformist tradition: state autonomy and financing. It considers these factors, in turn, as causes of qualitative impoverishment. The World Bank detects the danger underlying Argentine institutional habits. It justifies ministerial control and the selective allocation of

resources as the necessary 'solution' to this 'danger'. The Bank assumes that there is a 'generalised lethargy in the performance of academics'. This is sufficient grounds for evaluating their productivity, and authorising the use of economic stimuli in relation to them, in order to reverse this tendency to 'lethargy', expressed in terms of inefficiency, lack of discipline, politicisation, demoralisation, and so on.

Problems of low quality and inefficiency also affect the universities. The faculty on this level is poorly compensated, commonly works only part-time, and frequently misses classes or only exerts minimal effort to teach. The students enjoy free education but generally take much more time than necessary to complete a course of study or drop out before completing their studies. In addition, higher education is highly politicised: the universities are legally autonomous, the students participate in the elections of their university government, and the faculties (or colleges) are frequently disrupted by political confrontations between political parties and interest groups.

One of the reasons for the low quality in education is inadequate and inefficient expenditure. ... Although the expenditure should be increased as part of a solution to the problems in the education sector of Argentina, it should be accompanied by institutional changes in order to resolve serious problems of morale and discipline (The World Bank 1993, 83/84).

The Bank urges that this loss of prestige also extends to the students. As a solution, it suggests monitoring of student performance, as well as restricted admission to the university, and the payment of tuition. In its argument, free admittance to the university is linked to the squandering of university resources and to the increased politicisation of the university.

The government of Argentina has efficiently fulfilled the recommendations proposed by the international agenda for the modernisation of higher education, including:

- the reduction of subsidies and redistribution of the budget;
- the creation of new bureaucratic organisms in order to monitor the universities' policies, such as the Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias (SPU), and the Fondo para el Mejoramiento de la Calidad (FOMEQ);
- the setting in motion of evaluative and accreditation processes. The Law of Higher Education established the National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation (CONEAU), an organism that functions under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, composed of representatives from the Chamber of Deputies and Senators of the Nation, university rectors and one representative from the Academy of Education.

Nonetheless, in Argentina – and probably in the rest of Latin America as well – an important paradox has been produced. From the middle of the century onward, the so-called Welfare State, understood as the Pedagogical State, exercised its control by monopolising educational financing at all levels. In this way, the State could intervene directly in order to guarantee the availability of public education, although in the case of the university this was done in the context of academic and scientific autonomy, both proclaimed and real. Now, the university community interprets the central government as the 'Evaluator-State' (Neave and Van Vught, 1991). The Evaluator-State strives to preserve its controlling function, but not the financing function. This has serious consequences for the quality and equity of public universities. The new 'modernised' State tends to distance itself from public interests and general welfare, in order to preserve its finance-based rationale (financing what appears to be efficient) and obey the commands of a limited market. Here we note that in Argentina the entrepreneurial market is almost monopolistic. Its dynamic does not reflect the two liberal rules of pluralism and free competition.

In summary, economic globalisation has transformed the Welfare State into a neo-liberal State, promoting a significant change in the relationship between university actors and the public sector. For example, under conditions of structural adjustment and financial regulation, the coexistence of diverse missions ('multipurposes') within a university reduces the possibilities for achieving any of the university's missions with the excellence required. The entrepreneurial perspective of the university does not take into account excellence in the production and distribution of knowledge as the sole mission that best reflects the nature of the university. This creates a gap between the international agents' diagnoses and the university's traditional identity.

Final reflections

To respond to this crisis with history and culture constitutes a proposal that is hardly consistent with the values of structural adjustment and regulatory policies oriented toward efficiency, efficacy, and financial resource management. This very fashionable vision implies returning to the theory of human capital, assigning the universities a dominant role in the training of human resources. These values are the expression of a corporate culture – a corporate culture that is a counter-culture to the Reformist culture.

The confrontation between the two cultures revolves around two constituent ideas of the Reformist ethos. First, whether the university should or should not be the place where professionals are formed in order to become the national ruling class. And, second, whether the primary function of the university should or should not be the teacher-student function, at once formational, in terms of

moral character, and promotional, in terms of the national humanistic culture of the ruling class.

Both conceptions, the Reformist culture and the corporate culture, are far removed from the reality of our university institutions today. The Argentine universities are not currently forming humanistic professionals who become part of the national ruling class. Nor are they governed by administrators or 'effective managers' who run the institutions as true corporations, operating upon the logic of cost-benefit analysis. The two scenarios are fictions. Nonetheless, universities are now being used increasingly to serve the interests of the corporate culture.

The cultural analysis of universities asserts that society not only demands products from its universities that are consumed passively, but also that society itself assigns meaning to those products that do not necessarily correspond to the intentions of the scientists, the academics, the professors or the students themselves. The professional model of the 'University of Lawyers' was constructed upon the idea of the university formulated by Cardinal Newman and the Napoleonic University. State and University were an indissoluble dyad for training the ruling class in Latin America. Today, the interaction between a neo-liberal state and a society in search of new identities offers Latin American universities a scenario for institutional change characterised by the transition from old paradigms toward new models in construction. Diverse tensions are produced at this moment of transition.

How can we overcome the confrontation between the Reformist culture and the entrepreneurial culture? How can we gain access to excellence in a context of adjustment and regulation? How can we change multi-purpose institutions into single-mission institutions that serve the democratic expectations of the actors involved? Does institutional differentiation constitute a solution for achieving the sought-after excellence? Are the new private entrepreneurial universities training the future corporate leaders or are they being trained in the public institutions? Are Argentine young generations being formed in democratic, pluralistic, and participatory values as they used to be formed under the Reformist tradition?

The Church and the universities, both medieval institutions, have withstood the passage of time. Confronting schisms, reforms, cataclysms, struggles, and wars, nonetheless, they have survived. The history of the Reformist culture is the testimony of university actors who set out to improve academic quality together in conjunction with a democratic ethos. They created a new institutional style.

One possible response to the university crisis is to reinvent history, one more time.

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